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# FIRE MARSHAL NEWSLETTER



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"HAPPY TURKEY DAY!"



SUGGESTED FIRE PREVENTION PROGRAM FOR YOU VOLUNTEERS

The number of fire incidents continue to grow along with loss of property and lives each year. This is a good incitation that we are not doing a good job of fire prevention and suppression. Fire department members are finally beginning to realize putting out fires is not all there is to their jobs. We've got to take a broader view and exert as much effort in trying to prevent fires from starting, and prevent fires that do start from getting larger in size, as we do with actual suppression efforts.

During the annual fire chiefs' meeting in Polson last month this seemed to be the main theme of the program. Most of the chiefs there agreed with that concept. However, since only 20% of the fire chiefs in the state attended, it seems appropriate that I should repeat the one suggestion that came to mind as I spoke to the chiefs, that was that volunteer fire departments who presently have a women's auxiliary should make an attempt to utilize their services for one of the most effective fire prevention programs implemented. It seems to us this effort is worth trying. Some of the reasons we believe it will work are:

1. There isn't a more concerned segment of our citizenry than the average mother and housewife. Women always exhibit more concern over tragic incidents than anyone else and therefore would be more willing to prevent the occurrence of tragic events.
2. It would give wives of the firefighters some tangible connection with the fire department and would enhance their interest in your organization. We all know that for a volunteer fire department to be an effective organization the wives must be willing to understand and share their husbands' interest in the department.
3. Most volunteer firefighters do not have time to conduct inspection programs. The matter of trying to make a living leaves little time for a program of door-to-door fire inspections.

This suggested inspection program is intended for the residences in your community, not the business or industrial fire problems. We would be willing, as I am sure the Fire Service Training Department would, to conduct home inspection training programs for your auxiliary and supervise the program to a good start. It is understandable that a certain amount of publicity and education in your community is necessary before such a program is attempted. The success of the home inspection program is entirely dependent upon the acceptance by the residents. We feel it would be enthusiastically endorsed by a majority of home owners.

We can provide you with information that would be helpful in the educational program. Incidents of fire occur much more frequently in the home than in any other occupancy; roughly 40% of our fires occur in the average home. Practically all of the people we lose in Montana from fire die in residential fires. That amounts to somewhere around 40 or 50 people each year. This inspection program would certainly save a number of these lives.

This inspection program could be incorporated with a home alarm detection program sponsored by the fire department or auxiliary. By this means you could inform the home owners that they are able to purchase smoke detectors at a reasonable price. They could be instructed in the maintenance and care of these detectors and if you so desire the fire department or auxiliary could be the

selling agency thereby generating some funding.

In our way of thinking this seems like one of the best methods of preventing fires and saving lives. It certainly deserves serious consideration by every volunteer fire department. If you don't have an auxiliary, by all means try to organize one. We are anxious to hear from someone willing to start this program as a pilot attempt. We will be willing to cooperate in order to get it off the ground.

We in the fire service have the responsibility of reducing this atrocious loss of life and property from fire in Montana.

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### NEW SPILL RECOVERY UNITS IN THE STATE

Western Environmental Services is offering a new service to Montana. Equipped and staffed to handle any type of oil or hazardous material spill, they will provide five hour service anywhere in the state. They have experience in highway, railroad, and waterway spills.

The Portland, Oregon based firm has two mobile units in Montana; one in Missoula and one in Miles City. The mobile units are trucks with trailers capable of providing equipment and supplies for any type spill. A complete communications system is incorporated into the trailer with capability to mate with all other agency radios. Another feature of each unit is a complete reference library on hazardous materials. Utilizing local drivers, these units respond while the technical crew is enroute.

The technical crew composed of a project supervisor, a master chemist, a foreman, and three trained technicians are capable of being enroute in one hour. The central dispatch notifies one of the two crews and they are flown by corporate aircraft to the scene.

The company has a 24 hour, 7 day-a-week hot line which places you in touch with the central dispatch. The hot line number is (503) 283-5600.

Additional information may be obtained by writing to: Western Environmental Services, foot of North Portsmouth Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97203.

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### ATTENTION!

*Do all of the businesses in your communities that sell fire extinguishers and/or fire alarms have their required sales permits??*

## THOMPSON FALLS FIRE CHIEF RESIGNS

Charles B. Applegate, chief of the Thompson Falls Fire Department for the past 17 years, submitted his resignation effective August 1 to the City Council recently in a letter read by Mayor David Haase.

Applegate said he was retiring for health reasons. He noted he had been a member of the fire department for 30 years.

Firemen are expected to elect a successor to Applegate soon. Their selection is subject to approval by the City Council.

In accepting Applegate's resignation, Mayor Haase expressed public thanks to him for the years he has devoted to the fire department.

Since Applegate took over as chief from the late E. H. Davis in 1959, the department acquired its new pumper truck while State Rep. Orin P. Kendall was mayor. A number of other improvements in equipment and training have been made also under Applegate's leadership.

In his letter of resignation, Applegate expressed thanks to the council and the people of Thompson Falls for the support they had given the firemen through the years.

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## FIRE PREVENTION - EARLY DETECTION - EARLY SUPPRESSION

Fire prevention, early detection, early suppression, in that order, is the optimum of fire service. A fire that is prevented from starting may have saved lives or prevented physical and mental scars on its victims. It is the duty of the fire service to continually educate their communities in fire prevention.

Great Falls had a free home fire prevention inspection program for the month of October. This was done in conjunction with Fire Prevention Week. During the home inspection, the resident was given information about home fire detectors.

The prices on the smoke, ionization, and heat detectors will vary. Most firms selling these units have sale prices as low as \$18.85. The fire service should be supporting local businesses selling these fire detectors.

Fire suppression personnel would rather fight a fire in the early stages, thus saving lives and protecting property. This can be obtained through constant fire prevention, education, and early fire detection.

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## LIBBY VOLUNTEERS GET STATE'S FIRST ISO CLASS 4 RATING

It is reported that the 28-man volunteer department serves about 14,000 persons including those outside Libby in the Lincoln County rural fire district.

The combined asset valuation of the area served is approximately \$8 Million and the total annual budget is \$37,000 with \$25,000 for rural protection. However, this figure includes \$12,500 for truck payments.

The department handles an average of 110 calls annually, besides annual school visits, three drills a month, and one public meeting each month.

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## INFORMATION FROM THE WESTERN FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

The Public Safety Officers' Benefits Act of 1976 authorizes the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to pay a benefit of \$50,000 to specified survivors of State and local public safety officers found to have died as the direct and proximate result of a personal injury sustained in the line of duty.

"Public safety officer" is defined as "a person serving a public agency in an official capacity, with or without compensation, as a law enforcement officer or as a fireman". Among those for whom coverage is intended are persons involved in crime and juvenile delinquency control or reduction, or enforcement of the criminal laws, including police, corrections, probation, parole, and judicial officers. Paid and volunteer firefighters are also covered. No benefit is to be paid if death is caused by the intentional misconduct or voluntary intoxication of the officer, or the actions of a potential beneficiary. Deaths resulting from occupational illness or chronic disease would also not qualify.

The Act applies to deaths occurring from injuries sustained on or after the date of its enactment. However, payments can be made only to the extent provided for in advance by appropriation Acts. Claims are now being accepted by LEAA. However, no benefits can be paid until an appropriation is made by Congress.

Once LEAA approves a claim, the \$50,000 benefit will be paid as follows:

- (1) If there is no surviving child of the deceased officer, to the surviving spouse.
- (2) If there is a surviving child or children and a surviving spouse, one-half to the child or children in equal shares and one-half to the surviving spouse.
- (3) If there is no surviving spouse, to the child or children of the officer in equal shares.
- (4) If none of the above, to the dependent parent or parents of the officer in equal shares.

The Internal Revenue Service has ruled that the \$50,000 benefit is not subject to Federal taxation. Similarly, the Act assures it will not be subject to execution or attachment. The benefit is intended to be in addition to other benefits received by the family of a deceased officer. It would be reduced only by payments authorized by Public Law 90-291--where a Federal crime is involved--or certain payments authorized by the District of Columbia Code.

## PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS' BENEFITS ACT (Continued)

Claims for benefits under the Act should be submitted to the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, 633 Indiana Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20531. Claims forms and additional information can be obtained by writing to this address.

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### ARSON ON INCREASE

In terms of property losses, arson is fast becoming the leading crime in America. Montana suffers the same ills and in many cases, sections of cities are becoming uninhabitable due to arson-related crimes. Fewer than half of all suspicious fires are fully investigated, and only a fraction of those investigations result in arrests and convictions. For example, how often does criminal arson not reach the courts simply because a prosecuting attorney is reluctant to handle a sticky case or is unfamiliar with how to handle an arson case? Many arsonists go scott-free and those convicted receive light sentences. The need for an attack on arson is obvious, appealing to many communities ranging from the insurance investigator to local sheriff departments. But not so obvious are the answers to the problem of where to begin. Prevention and detection efforts receive little tax support, but we must pay taxes to combat an epidemic of fires. One of the foremost problems is the lack of clear cut law enforcement responsibilities in many localities. Should the fire service personnel be expected, following their initial report of a fire of suspicious origin, to conduct a full investigation? Or should police personnel be responsible or should the investigation be assigned to a fire/police team? We do not believe these questions have a precise answer, applicable in all cases. What works in cities may not address the needs of investigators in rural areas. However, we do believe that better communications and professional information exchange may contribute to better utilization of the limited resources now available to combat arson. We are convinced that a significant reduction of arson losses can and will occur if a systematic approach is made in the detection and enforcement activities. This means developing a better understanding of arson problems between groups such as fire service personnel and law enforcement.

Because arson is such a broad and complex problem, one might be tempted to say the only way to deal with it is to start a massive program. While such a program could be effective, it may not be necessary to do everything at once to get results. However, one objective is certain, the beginning of a productive program starts with a systematic approach at grass roots level. An arson squad, consisting of one police officer and one fire officer can provide the basis for better cooperation between the two agencies and can have a demonstrable impact throughout Montana.

Better investigation through cooperation and a progressive program on public awareness is the key approach to arson.

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LAST HEARING FOR FIRE CODES STUDY

The Legislative Council Subcommittee working on the revision of state fire laws will be holding their last hearing this month in Lewistown, November 22 at 2:00 p.m. This committee has been working since the last legislative session on laws relating to volunteers, their organizational structure, the fire service training organization, the Fire Marshal office, and the state wild land fire problems. The information this committee will submit to the legislative council for approval and, hopefully, to the legislature in the form of bills is of extreme concern to all of you fire chiefs. We repeat, never will you have such an opportunity to provide input for the revision, amending, or drafting of new legislation that will affect the fire service. We urge you to attend this session, especially those chiefs in the close proximity of Lewistown.

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. GOT THE 901 BLUES?

*If you still find yourself having trouble with the 901F Basic Field Incident forms, contact this office.*

*Over the past few months, Fay Hanson of our office has been giving instruction on the completion of these forms. She would be available at any time to travel to your city or town and put on this program for your department or county fire council.*

*We urge you to take advantage of this program. We also urge you to submit any suggestions, ask any questions, or let us know of any problems you are having regarding this form.*

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DO YOU HAVE A NEW CHIEF OR A NEW ADDRESS FOR YOUR FIRE DEPARTMENT? IF SO, PLEASE LET US KNOW SO YOU WILL BE SURE TO RECEIVE FUTURE REPORTS, NEWSLETTERS, AND ANNUAL REPORTS.

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HAVE A HAPPY FIRE-FREE HOLIDAY SEASON